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California's Cruising Challenge . . .



Strangely eroded cliffs, some of which spout small geysers, are interesting to explore around Santa Rosa. Though not as scenically lovely as Santa Cruz, nor as abundantly provided with coves, this island is a fascinating one.

Part II of a Series

Story and photos by
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In PART I, which led off our December issue, the author explained the vagaries of the often-fearsome Northern Channel Islands. We crossed the channel, briefly touched on Anacapa Island, the first offshore shelter, and visited some of the popular coves and beautiful Santa Cruz. This month we continue our Santa Cruz cove-hopping and complete the chain with explorations of Santa Rosa and San Miguel Islands.

MANY week-ends or one-day yachtsmen spend some time in Smugglers Cove, one of the most accessible and prettiest coves on Santa Cruz, where one can still see the neat olive groves of the Caire enterprise, now tended by the Gherinis who run sheep in this area. It is simple to anchor in Smugglers with a wide, sandy-bottomed cove to choose a spot from. Caution must be exercised, however, when staying overnight, as there is considerable surge, and more than one boat has come to grief on the shores during the night when an anchor has slipped. The anchorage is severely exposed to adverse winds.

Along the south side of Santa Cruz

are quiet cruising waters most of the time, protected from prevailing westerly winds by the bulk of the mountainous island, much like Catalina. However, it differs from Catalina in that the south side is open to the normal ocean swells. Near the point on charts marked "Yellow Cliffs," there are kelp beds near shore; and even from the deck you can look down into the beautifully clear, greenish water and see the kelp forests gracefully swaying.

There are several popular, snug anchorages along the south side, safe in most weather except during unusually large swells. Hungryman's Gulch is easy to recognize because the point to the south is white and the one to the north is black. Watch out for a rock in the middle of this anchorage.

An interesting bit of information about Valley Anchorage is that a geological fault runs through the entire island to Valley, and a fair-sized stream used to follow this fault, emptying into the sea at this point. Some years ago,

however, erosion caused the stream to be diverted to the north and it now terminates in Prisoner's Bay.

Coches Prietos is a delightful anchorage, although there is quite considerable surge at the entrance. When entering, keep somewhat to the starboard because of a reef to the port. Willows Anchorage is easily distinguishable by the pillars of rock which make it look like a "car port." One of two boats can lay in the "car port," but experienced fishermen claim that it is better to stay outside of these pillars, anchoring to the starboard close in toward the cliff, where there is less surge.

Coming around the southern part of Santa Cruz Island, before going over to Santa Rosa, there is one of the finest skin diving spots in the entire California offshore area. This is between Gull Island and Punta Arena where a vast undulating sea of kelp shelters all types of sea life. A boat planning to go beyond Gull Island, however, should stay to the outside of the island because heavy kelp can make real trouble for unprotected props.

The southwesterly shore of Santa Cruz offers little in the way of anchorages. It is a wind-swept, lonely stretch of eroding shoreline with several sandy spits jutting out into the Santa Cruz Channel. In most weather, except a southeaster, Morse Point is a possible anchorage if you are able to tuck yourself in under the protection of the Point. Forney's Cove is a good haven in a westerly wind, but for a sudden northeaster, an anchorage near Canada Cervada is safer.

On an average afternoon you are met by a choppy sea down the Santa Cruz Channel as you round Gull Island. Here winds sweep down, unbroken, from Point Conception, but it is only about an eight-mile run across to the protection of East Point at Santa Rosa Island.

Santa Rosa, even at first glance, is quite a different island from Santa Cruz. Largely treeless and dry, the island is covered with brown grass and scrubby vegetation. Its low-lying cliffs terminate a few feet above the water and curve inward in a mushroom-like fashion to the water from the constant eroding by the restless ocean. The dry-appearing grass is, however, ideal for fattening cattle, and the entire island is operated by the Vail Brothers as a cattle ranch—one of the most successful in the West, because there are few natural hazards such as disease or straying, since the cattle are isolated; so all that

The Channel Islands

Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron, a lonely outpost which is serviced from a tall pier where loading and unloading of cargo and personnel is accomplished by the use of a wire cage on a crane, because of the impressive surge often existing. The spot is a rolling but safe enough anchorage, one of the few on Santa Rosa, but an anchor watch is always a must. Under the lee of Ford Point is dubious protection also. Cruising along the south side of the island, watch the cliffs carefully, and you will see several interesting blowholes spouting like geysers where the low cliffs have been undercut.

Between East Point and Skunk Point there is a shallow area running up onto a long sandy beach; in fact, Skunk Point itself is only a long, sandy spit extending out into the channel. Afternoon seas build up around this shallow area, with opposing currents foaming up in such a manner that there appears to be a reef extending out far beyond the point.

Entering Becher's Bay, you will see the Vail Ranch pier toward the west. Some of the ranch buildings are visible from the water, but the ranch house is hidden in a hollow beyond the first rise. While there is excellent holding ground near the pier, it is better to venture part way into the kelp to the starboard of the pier. Thus, the land gives protection from extremely strong winds that regularly sweep down off the mesa above.

Exploring along the shore of Becher's in a small boat is fun as there are unusual eroded shapes along the cliffs; and fishing is also good in spots, especially near Carrington Point to the north, although one must watch for turbulence from opposing currents here. Becher's Bay is no place to be in a northerly or northeasterly, or even easterly wind, as waves have been known to crash clear over the 20-ft. high pier at the Vail Ranch. However, the vigilant yachtsman can easily make the three-mile leap across the channel to the protection of Santa Cruz if he starts in time.

Cruising westward along the north side of Santa Rosa, one must stay considerably offshore to avoid the gigantic kelp beds that lie off the shallow, eroding shelf on the north shore. The beds are teeming with sea life, including, to our astonishment, a variety of lively shrimp. Grotesque-looking kelp cutters often work in the beds, for kelp has must be done is to turn them loose and wait till they get fat.

Johnson's Lee at South Point is a neat settlement of the Air Force 669th

myriads of commercial uses.

Bleak as it may appear, Santa Rosa has a fascinating history archaeologically. On the north shore near Canada Tecolote scientists from the Santa Barbara Museum found the now famous barbecued mammoth bone, 29,000 years old, which established the island as the site of one of the oldest civilizations in North America. This also verified the fact that the offshore islands were once a part of the mainland.

Like Santa Cruz, the island of Santa Rosa is not open to casual visitors. Both of the island ranches fear brush fires set by careless beachcombers, and both the Stanton and Vail Ranch cattle herds have suffered losses from the wanton pot-shots of gun-bearing yachtsmen.

San Miguel Island, the outermost of the northern Channel Islands, is a wind-swept patch of land bombarded not only by the elements, but at times by the Air Force, and you will notice that the area is restricted. If such were not the case, the only harbor worth entering on the island would be Cuyler Harbor on the northeast, a wide rock-strewn harbor guarded at its entrance by Prince Island. Anyone forced to enter the harbor in dire emergency must approach it from the north, easing in carefully between Middle Rock and Bat Rock, keeping well off the latter since a long reef extends into the bay from that side, often with breaking

surf over the shoal.

Looking at the desert-like island, most of which is quite literally being blown into the sea a grain of sand at a time, it is hard to believe that it was once a green, well-watered paradise. (Although now part of the interior is lush grazing-land.) Archaeologists tell us that 10,000 years ago, San Miguel Island was the most thickly populated area in the United States. As late as the 1800's there was a lake on San Miguel—alkaline, it is true, but "wet." During the Civil War, sheep were grazed on the island, living partially on the prolific ice plant which flourished and gave them water, but the sheep damaged the grasslands beyond reclamation.

Today the only residents are thousands of sea lions which enjoy solitude at the west end of San Miguel near Point Bennett. There are the remains of a ranch on San Miguel, where an Eastern-born recluse lived with his wife and two children for 14 years prior to 1942, when the gentleman shot himself. Cabrillo, who has been given the credit for naming the offshore islands, is supposed to be buried on San Miguel, but no one has ever discovered the site of the burial despite extensive search.

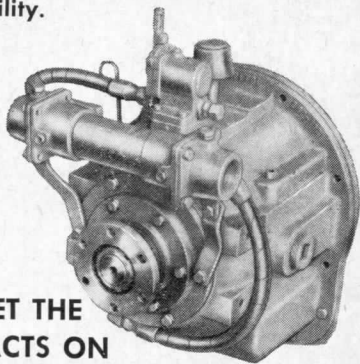
In the author's opinion, none but the stoutest of yachts should venture to the north and west of San Miguel. All along the northern shore of the island
(Continued on page 186)



Becher's Bay is one of the better anchorages at Santa Rosa Island but dangerous in northerly, northeasterly and easterly winds. There is good holding ground near the Vail Ranch pier, but it is safer to go part way into the kelp.

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Channel Islands

(Continued from page 53)

are reefs of every description, some just under water, some reaching their jagged teeth above—all inviting disaster for the mariner who makes even a slight miscalculation in navigation. From Cuyler Harbor around the north side and west side to the southerly side, there is absolutely no possibility of getting safely ashore, in the event of a stalled engine or an empty gas tank. The bones of many a commercial vessel rest below the surface on the reefs, unsalvaged because of the danger in approaching the seething mass of water with swirling currents below.

For one who wishes to keep a respectful distance, the north side is quite a spectacle with wild white water leaping up without pattern here and there; and north of Point Bennett the tremendous forces of currents and normally high winds result in extremely confused seas where walls of foam-topped water rise up angrily to great heights. SEA has described the area, in past writings, as "fearsome," and deep water sailors are familiar with Richardson's Rock (a little north of San Miguel at Point Bennett) as the touchy terminus of the annual rugged Channel Islands Race.

On the south side of San Miguel the water is tranquil enough, being in the lee of the island. One could anchor in Tyler Bight, if necessary, watching the rocks on entering. However, one sailor who was forced to spend the night there states that the sand was plastered 1/2 inch thick on his mast when he awoke the following morning! Forty-knot winds are not uncommon at all.

Yes, the northern Channel Islands offer variety and a challenge as cruising waters. As always, they can be explored safely with the usual precautions—watch the fuel, watch the charts, watch the weather, watch the anchor... and we might add one more to this trip—watch your heart, for you will lose it to these fiercely beautiful islands. END

NAYRU Annual Meeting Jan. 17

The North American Yacht Racing Union will hold its 36th annual general meeting and dinner Jan. 17 at the New York Yacht Club. An illustrated talk by Alfred F. Loomis, featuring Blue Water Racing motion pictures taken aboard *Escapade* in the Montego Bay Race and *Lutine* in the Fastnet, will highlight the evening.

International London Show

The great 1962 International Boat Show with 450 exhibits under one roof will be held between Jan. 3 and 13 at Earls Court, London.

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